

FINAL

STATEMENT OF
FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
INCLUDED IN
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR STATEMENT

Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee Forests and Public Lands Management
United States Senate

Concerning
The Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery

April 21, 1999

The Forest Service is working to provide a quality experience for visitors during the bicentennial while continuing to provide long term protection for the Lewis and Clark trail segments on National Forest System lands...

From 1803-1806, Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery explored the Missouri and Columbia River systems looking for the fabled inland passage to the Pacific Ocean. Their trail covered over 4,000 miles, mostly by water, with the exception of the portion of the route they traveled overland between the headwaters of the Missouri and the Columbia Rivers. About 210 miles of the overland portion of the Lewis and Clark trail is on National Forest System lands. This is a segment of the 4,000 mile route designated in 1978 as a National Historic Trail.

The trail of Lewis and Clark is fascinating to a growing number of people. In the past few years the number of people retracing the route has doubled. During the bicentennial years of 2003-2006, a record number of people from around the world will retrace the journey of Lewis and Clark. Communities, organizations, and tribes will sponsor events that will encourage and enhance this experience.

Cooperation with the communities will present unique opportunities and challenges to the Forest Service.

The agency will be involved in a variety of resource management and coordination activities through its National Forest System and State and Private Forestry programs, including:

1. interpretation and historic preservation of the trail;
2. community assistance in resource and economic development to prepare for this event;
3. collaboration with Native American tribes in interpreting and preserving historic, archaeological, and sacred sites; and
4. accommodation of increased variety and numbers of visitors, by managing conflicts in use and ensuring that the effects on the resources are acceptable or mitigated.

Preparations on National Forest System lands

The mountainous overland segments of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail are located on National Forest System (NFS) lands in the states of Idaho and Montana. Visitors can experience the same locations and see the same landscapes Lewis and Clark wrote about in their journals. These lands have much of the same appearance today as they did 200 years ago.

This is a powerful experience that will be very attractive and exciting for many visitors. This attraction does raise concerns about how the Forest Service will accommodate the increased number of visitors while protecting the uniqueness of the area.

The Forest Service has evaluated the availability of visitor services and current management of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail on the affected National Forests. Our primary findings show that road access and capacity of key segments of the trail and facilities are limited, the route contains sensitive heritage resources, interpretive signs are in need of updating, and there are opportunities to enhance access and use of undeveloped sections of trail. The Forest Service strategy focuses on five key points:

1. protecting the heritage resources along the trail;

2. updating information and interpretation for the public;
3. refreshing existing recreation developments to address safety, sanitation, and accessibility concerns;
4. providing enhanced visitor assistance and service during the Bicentennial period; and
5. regulating use, if necessary, in areas where use may exceed capacity of the infrastructure.

Community Support

Many westerners have referred to the bicentennial as "the tourism event of the century". Communities, tribes, and State Foresters are enthusiastically telling us they want to embrace tourism, leave a legacy by enhancing and interpreting their resources, beautify their community entrances and main streets, and enhance aesthetics through urban and community forestry. Numerous communities along the trail are already gearing up for this event and are looking to Federal agencies to participate and lend support. This is also an opportunity for the Forest Service and communities to reestablish positive relations with Native Americans who were so essential to the success of the expedition and who have a stake in the natural and cultural resources we all value.

Through the State and Private Forestry Program, the Forest Service is involved with communities in assisting with their bicentennial efforts. State and Private Forestry is focusing on 3 areas:

1. economic action programs, such as seed money and technical assistance, for communities and tribal governments;
2. urban and community forestry through state foresters; and
3. conservation education through state foresters, communities, and national forests.

The Agency has a Rural Community Assistance Coordinator for the Northern and Intermountain Regions to provide assistance to communities in their planning efforts. The coordinator attends the National Bicentennial Council meetings, Montana and Idaho Governor's Bicentennial Committee meetings, Governor's Tourism Conferences, and is a member of the field-level interagency memorandum of understanding (MOU) working committee.

The work of the Rural Community Assistance Coordinator is complemented by representatives from the National Forests and Ranger Districts working with their respective community groups and Native American Tribes in local planning efforts.

Interagency Coordination

The Forest Service will be a significant player in the activities commemorating the Bicentennial, but it is far from the only player. Several Federal agencies, most of which are represented here today, will have active roles in the commemorative events. In 1997 work was begun on a MOU to establish a general framework for cooperation among State and Federal agencies, tribes, and with the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council. This MOU was finalized and signed on October 1, 1998.

The Agencies and the Council are working together to achieve the common goal of advancing domestic and international awareness, understanding, and appreciation of one of the most remarkable and productive scientific and military exploratory expeditions in the history of the United States. Through the commemoration of this landmark event in American history, the Agencies, Tribal governments and the Council will help to provide leadership for all interested parties in observing the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial and renewing America's commitment to our National Historic Trails. This collaborative effort seeks to:

1. foster understanding and protection of the cultural and natural resources along the route;
2. encourage economic advancement in the communities and States through which the expedition traveled;
3. enhance the quality of life in America; and
4. develop a new understanding and appreciation for all of America's indigenous nations and cultures.

The Forest Service has designated bicentennial coordinators in the Northern and Intermountain Regions and the National headquarters to work with the MOU participants. These coordinators have established working relations with the other Federal agencies, Tribal governments and the Bicentennial Council and participate in interagency coordination meetings at the field and national levels.

Summary

The bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition is a multi-year event that will receive world-wide attention. It is looked upon with great optimism for what it can do for the economic well being of rural communities across the west. Mixed with this optimism are the challenges of coordination of many activities across several states and through many levels of governmental jurisdiction. The Forest Service is excited about this event and looks forward to playing a significant role, in cooperation with other Federal agencies and Tribal governments, to meet community and visitor expectations while protecting and preserving this unique cultural heritage for future generations.